



THE CANADIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
BUSINESS INSIGHTS

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SHAPE UP CANADA! IT'S TIME FOR



DIET PLAN

**THE CHAMBER INVITES CANADIANS TO
JOIN THE CALL FOR FISCAL FITNESS**



By Lisa Nowlan

HOUGEN'S TRAVELS

From Glasnost in the Soviet Union, to progress in India, outgoing Chamber Chairman Rolf Hougen advises Canadian businesses to seize the opportunities while history is on the move

The memory of a sweltering, obstacle-course-like drive through India and a large bottle of liqueur with three live cobras inside, are two reminders of the year Rolf Hougen served as Chairman of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

The hot sticky cab ride was an attempt to see the Taj Nihal when Hougen and his wife, Margaret, visited Delhi, the political capital of India for the 5th annual India-Canada Joint Business Council meeting in November. "The cab was supposed to be air-conditioned for the four hour ride to Agra," says Hougen. It wasn't. And even though the car spewed out black exhaust and clamored into the ditch now and then to avoid oncoming traffic, Hougen gave

the driver a big tip "simply for getting us back alive."

The bottle is part of 1-lougen's liqueur collection representing 90 different countries and totaling 800 in number. Hougen picked up this particular bottle, which claims to diminish aches and pains, strengthen bones and extend a person's life, during a visit to China. "It's nice to have something to look for when we travel. Rugs and gems are interesting but searching for liqueur bottles gives you a living collection you can sample and share."

These are only a few of the mementoes from what Hougen describes as an incredible and fascinating year. Last September, when Hougen began his term as Chairman, he expressed his desire to strengthen the Chambers' relationship with independent

Rolf and Margaret in front of India's famous Taj Mahal



Canadian chambers in other countries. I'd like to think that I now have a much better understanding of Canada, the chamber and its relationship internationally." From a business point of view, says Hougen, getting inside another country and discovering what it's all about is invaluable.

Exploring other countries is something Hougen, one of the Yukon's most prominent entrepreneurs, had a lot of experience at during his 1989-90 term as Chamber Chairman. But that's nothing new to 61-year-old Hougen. He's traveled all over Canada serving on the national boards of several major corporations including Alberta Power Ltd. and the Asia Pacific Foundation. In the past, his business travels have also taken him to almost every corner of the world. As he'll tell you, building a liqueur collection from 90 different countries doesn't happen overnight.

What was new to the Flougen's, among other things, was learning to pack all over again. Margaret recalls the difficulty of trying to select clothes that would take her from the 30-plus degrees Celsius temperatures in Delhi and Bombay, to the below freezing Moscow temperatures a few days later.

The Hougens also managed to pick up a few new traveling tips. In India, where airline travel is considered a luxury and flights can be cancelled arbitrarily, it's advisable to arrive at the airport at least two hours before the flight. With the help of a persistent Peter Egyed, director of trade promotion for the Chamber, the Hougens were able to secure seats from Delhi to Bombay during an Indian Airlines baggage handlers strike.

Despite the brief span of time spent in each location, Hougen says he and Margaret tried to understand as much about each country as they could. You could live in India a lifetime, says Hougen, and not really know it at all. "It's vast, varied and diverse.

It's also a definite area of opportunity for Canadian business."

He talks about the progress the then President Gandhi made at removing investment restrictions and encouraging free movement of the economy. He also talks about India's current political uncertainty in the face of a new government. "It's so important for Canada to build close working relationships with other countries,



The Hougens in a Soviet winter wonderland- at Zagorsk Monastery City

to remove barriers and open doors."

"That's one of the areas of achievement Hougen is particularly pleased about during his year as Chairman. "I'm especially encouraged by the progress the Chamber's international division has made in establishing more meaningful relationships with business councils and foreign countries."

When it comes to positive change, the

Chamber's Focus 2000 division has the right objectives, says Hougen. "It's encouraging international competitiveness positively through education and training."

That kind of education and training is paramount in assisting the business community in Canada and abroad to cope with the magnitude of change that has occurred in the last decade, such as the transition of Eastern Europe toward liberal democracy and market economy.

Communism, says Hougen, has put the Soviets to sleep, and now they are just beginning to wake up to discover the free enterprise system, what it has to offer and what it takes to make it work. Now Canada must take a leadership role in supporting Gorbachev, the creator of Glasnost - the economic reform strategy.

During Hougen's visit to the Soviet Union, he witnessed Gorbachev's attempt to devalue the ruble by 90 per cent. But the effect wasn't a complete success. In some areas, the ruble is now worth 16 cents U.S., and in others, it's still at its old \$1.67 U.S. rate.

He describes an incident in a German-style restaurant where he and Margaret shared a mug of beer, wieners, mashed potatoes and a slice of bread each. The entire meal cost them \$18 U.S.

Later that night, he and Margaret and two others had dinner for four in a hotel that accepted rubles instead of hard (U.S.) currency. There, they enjoyed champagne, wine, vodka, caviar, smoked salmon, glazed sturgeon, ice cream with sauce, coffee and Armenian Brandy - all for the equivalent of \$14 U.S.

"Had we paid hard currency," says Hougen, "the cost would have been 10 times that." His advice to visitors:

If you can deal in rubles, the value to the tourist is outstanding.

Whether you deal in hard currency or

rubles, says Hougen, privately-owned ethnic restaurants are changing the way Russians and tourists alike think about food.

"Today, three or more people can get together and open up a restaurant. . . and there are some very fine ones. It's just one example of the positive changes taking place throughout the Soviet Union."

The Hougens were also impressed with the selection of theaters, restaurants and galleries in Moscow. "And I'll never forget the Arbat," says Hougen. "With so many things still state owned, it's one place where all the artists can gather to sell their wares, like hand-painted broaches and icons."

Though Hougen enjoyed the new choice of fare offered in the Soviet Union, he says that next to India's tandoori style of cooking, where a huge clay oven basks food in Indian herbs and spices, he enjoyed the magnificent banquets in Taiwan the best. "We tasted some of the most delicate food you could experience anywhere."

It's strange that Taiwan is so unknown to many, he adds. Not only does Taiwan operate a free press, it's actually second only to Japan in its investment in South East Asia. As for business opportunities in Taiwan, Hougen describes it as politically volatile, but says its people are well educated and open to change. Canada has already started to form a bond with the country. "Yet few people know that Canada's only presence in Taiwan is through the Chamber."

Hougen himself is amazed at all he has learned this past year about the strength of the Chamber movement in Canada and abroad.

Strong, committed and enormous are three words Hougen uses to describe the pyramid of provincial and local chambers that make up the movement. "I was especially impressed with the involvement of the volunteer committees and the input from the

local and provincial chambers."

He describes the pleasure he and Chamber President 'rim Reid shared when they attended the provincial chambers' annual meetings across Canada. "We spent a couple of days with each chamber and really got to understand them." Hougen was amazed at how the scope of opinions could differ from one region to another, and still form such a powerful common front. Because of their input, says Hougen, the Canadian Chamber really does speak for



In Taipei at the memorial to Chiang-Ka-Chek

170,000 businesses, be they large, medium or small.

Hougen expects the Chamber movement to continue growing worldwide, even in remote areas like Bangkok and Thailand, where he had the opportunity to speak about the Chamber during a visit to the Canada-Thailand Business Club.

Back in September, Hougen said that leading Canadian business into a more competitive and productive 21st century was one of his prime goals. "And in this area, I feel we've made a lot of progress." The Canadian Chamber now has a very strong Asia-Pacific focus and has also made substantial progress in Hong Kong, says Hougen.

"We're new working with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong

and the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce to determine how we can link up our respective data base systems. That partnership will offer ChamberNet users access to an array of business and international information.

For all the knowledge Hougen says he has gathered of Canada and the Chamber, his term as Chairman has not been without disappointment.

"I am especially disappointed that the deficit has not been brought under control. I also wish we could have convinced the provinces to join us in lobbying for a single federal-provincial tax collection agency."

But all in all, Margaret echoes Hougen's views when she says that it's been a very special and incredible year. After all, Roif Hougen is one of two Canadians who shared the honour of presenting a special commemorative stamp on Canada Day to the Queen on Parliament Hill, along with Donald Lander, Chairman and CEO of Canada Post. And Margaret may very well be the only Canadian who can say she spent her birthday at the Bolshoi

Theater in Moscow, had dinner in the 15th Century Kremlin Palace and managed to get her hair done for the equivalent of 80 cents U.S.